

VZCZCXYZ4320
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #0639/01 0661513
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 061513Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7051
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 000639

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: SIDELINED DEMOCRATS SPECULATE ABOUT MEDVEDEV,
DESCRIBE CONTINUING CRISIS IN THEIR OWN RANKS

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In recent meetings with Ambassador, three opposition politicians described some of their current difficulties, the prospects for cooperation among western-looking democratic forces, and the future under President Medvedev. The three --ex-PM Kasyanov, ex-Duma Deputy Ryzhkov, and Yabloko party Chairman Yavlinskiy-- were uniformly pessimistic about prospects for western-looking democrats and prepared to believe that Medvedev could, under the right circumstances, usher in a more liberal Russia. In a separate meeting, Indem Director and former Yeltsin advisor Georgiy Satarov endorsed their pessimism about prospects for the liberals, and offered a few skeptical thoughts of his own for the prospect of a thaw. End summary.

Kasyanov's Tough Non-Campaign

12. (C) Of the three politicians Ambassador spoke to --ex-Prime Minister Kasyanov, ex-Duma Deputy Chairman Ryzhkov, and Yabloko party Chairman Yavlinskiy-- only Kasyanov had hazarded a run at the presidency. His campaign was stopped in its tracks, when the Central Election Commission refused to register him, and the courts rejected his numerous appeals. In Kasyanov's telling the Kremlin had decided to register him, but reversed field after "FSB polls" showed his potential candidacy rapidly gaining support even before he had been allowed on television, as would have been required had he been registered. Kasyanov told the Ambassador that pressure against his associates continued well after he had abandoned his candidacy, with criminal cases opened in ten regions for alleged falsification of signature lists.

Traditional Liberals A Spent Force

13. (C) Kasyanov described western-leaning democratic parties like the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and Yabloko as spent forces. "SPS is finished," he said. SPS patron Anatoliy Chubais's close relationship with the Kremlin required that he keep the party on a short leash, leaving the SPS leadership --Chairman Nikita Belykh and would-be presidential candidate Boris Nemtsov-- isolated. Further isolating them, according to Kasyanov, is support in the regions for Chubais's less confrontational line, where Kasyanov claimed that up to fifty percent of the SPS regional organizations were led by "local employees of (Chubais's) RAO UES company. Although Chubais sometimes comments carefully about the political process, he "fundamentally does not believe that Russia needs free elections," just a better environment for business, which he believes can be separated from the development of democracy, Kasyanov said.

14. (C) Kasyanov joined other commentators in describing

Yabloko as in "crisis." It had postponed its party congress until May in order to allow members to have a discussion about the transition to Medvedev. Kasyanov thought that Yavlinskiy lacked energy and, as importantly, the will or ability to forge alliances with others from the same camp. Garry Kasparov's Other Russia was similarly without constructive ideas and, instead of being able to forge alliances with other organizations, had become the last refuge for those unable to find a place for themselves in existing structures.

15. (C) Ryzhkov is now teaching at the Higher School for Economics, in addition to writing a column for the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, and working with Mikhail Gorbachev on the establishment of a memorial in honor of victims of the Gulag. Ryzhkov told the Ambassador he agreed with Kasyanov that western-leaning liberals were "inept." Ryzhkov saw Kasyanov, whose reputation for corruption when Prime Minister persists, as an uncertain asset for the democratic camp. Yavlinskiy, while smart, was handicapped by his "enormous ego." Ryzhkov had no kind words for Kasparov, with whom he has tentatively cooperated from time-to-time. He joined others in condemning the lack of an Other Russia strategy, and Kasparov's misguided attempt to run for president. In short, Ryzhkov saw little prospects in the near term for the development of civil society, but he did not dismiss the possibility that Medvedev, who has "different instincts on the rule of law" than Putin, could ultimately take steps to foster a more vibrant non-governmental sector.

16. (C) Yabloko Chairman Grigoriy Yavlinskiy, in his conversations with the Ambassador, closed the circle by making caustic comments about all of his counterparts, and foisting much of the blame for the continuing crisis among western-leaning liberals on others. In yet another meeting, Indem Director Georgiy Satarov dismissed the "old elite

within the liberal opposition who were democratic by "self-proclamation," after having "privatized democratic values for their own use." Satarov thought that Kasparov, Nemtsov, Yavlinskiy, and "For Human Rights" head Lev Ponomarev, while split on most issues were united by their belief in "confrontation" and conviction that "compromise is a sign of weakness." He in particular scored Kasparov's methods as divisive.

Little Prospect for Party Development

17. (C) Kasyanov waved away the possibility that a strong, Kremlin-assisted second party would appear on the horizon. There was little popular interest in parties as vehicles for the expression of political agendas. "What people want," Kasyanov said, "is normal social policy. They need the simple improvements in their lives." He alleged that, currently, "pensions are lower in Russia than in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan," and inflation, continued low salaries, a looming current account deficit, and poor infrastructure were "time bombs" for the Medvedev Administration.

18. (C) Although he did not comment on political parties as such, Satarov was moderately optimistic that Russia's emerging middle class would staff a new political generation that would insist on more transparent institutions. There were "more chances than not" that Russia would be a democratic country in a decade, Satarov thought. Its political culture was not that of China; Russian expectations of personal and professional freedom were higher.

Stubborn Corruption

19. (C) While Medvedev had already indicated that he would tackle Russia's worsening corruption, Kasyanov was not optimistic. The absence of a free media and independent judiciary needed to shine a light on and prosecute cases, in addition to Medvedev's continued close association with "corrupt" Gazprom, would cause all of his initiatives to be

stillborn. Satarov, for his part, thought an appropriate litmus test for Medvedev might be something he had promised in his Krasnoyarsk speech --the de-coupling of the Presidential Administration from service on the boards of parstatals, which would serve as "a blow to the siloviki and the bureaucracy that feeds off high-level corruption."

Medvedev

¶10. (C) Kasyanov predicted a relatively short transition period for President Medvedev. It would end in October, and in the interim, observers should focus on "key events," like the May 7 inauguration, the July G8 Summit, and the EU-Russia Summit, especially how Medvedev was portrayed by Russia's official television channels. Kasyanov was confident that Medvedev could have the reins firmly in hand in such a short period, especially with what he expected would be Putin's active assistance, but he also noted that Medvedev was "not the decision-maker" on any upcoming changes in personnel. Ryzhkov on the other hand predicted a power-sharing arrangement that would not, as has been widely speculated, lead to instability. "I believe (Putin and Medvedev) can pull it off," he said. Yavlinskiy told the Ambassador he had little contact with Medvedev, but did not dismiss the possibility that Medvedev "could have liberal instincts."

¶11. (C) In the meantime, Kasyanov forecast that Putin would remain Prime Minister only during a one-half year transition period; long enough to ensure that "siloviki" like Sechin, Ivanov, Cherkessov, Nurgaliyev, and Patrushev could pose no danger to Medvedev. Kasyanov rehearsed rumors that Minister of Justice Ustinov would be made Southern Region Polpred and Sechin would be moved full time to Rosneft. Kasyanov speculated that Surkov and Prikhodko would remain in their positions at the Kremlin.

12, (C) Although skeptical that Medvedev's presidency would usher in a permanent thaw, Satarov thought that his coming to power might mean less pressure on the opposition and a relaxed grip on state-controlled television, although he questioned how long that period might last. Whatever Medvedev's intentions, Satarov thought that the political establishment might limit Medvedev's reform efforts to the economy, with genuine political competition too contentious for his administration to undertake.

NATO Expansion, Kosovo, MD
Make Life Tougher for Liberals

¶13. (C) Turning to foreign affairs, Kasyanov predicted there would be no "direct consequences," if Georgia and/or Ukraine were offered a MAP at Bucharest, but any such move would be "uniformly condemned" in Russia and would strengthen the hands of those in the foreign policy establishment intent on confrontation with the West. Kasyanov hoped that any such decision would be delayed beyond Bucharest. An announcement on the eve of Medvedev's inauguration would pre-determine the foreign policy course for the new President. Ryzhkov guessed a Ukraine MAP would outrage Russian nationalists, and "Crimea would see real instability."

¶14. (C) Kasyanov noted that Russia's vulnerability was its desire for international legitimacy. Russia will not withdraw from any organization, even if they are having a difficult time, he said, adding that in organizations such as the OSCE, Russia was much more likely to attempt to "buy the influence" of other members than withdraw.

¶15. (C) Ryzhkov, as he has in past meetings with Ambassador, continued to worry about the consequences of Kosovo. The immediate by-product of its independence would be to further complicate the lives of "liberal forces" in Russia, he said. Ryzhkov hoped that the USG would pursue a "sincerely cooperative approach" with the GOR on missile defense, but he was not optimistic overall about developing a common approach.

Comment

¶16. (C) The tendency to dismiss western-leaning liberals as a spent force, even among the liberals themselves, is uniformly present here, while the absence of concrete information about Medvedev's intentions as President has fostered far-ranging speculation about the nature of the Putin-Medvedev tandem and Medvedev's own political inclinations. As is clear from the comments above, Medvedev for the time being is an empty vessel into which observers's highest expectations and worst fears are poured. Only with the passage of considerably more time will his own preferences for Russia --and ability to deliver on them-- become clear.

BURNS